

# REGIONAL REPORTS

## ALBERTA REPORT

The **Travelling Folk Festival & Goodtime Medicine Show** will be presented in twenty-one different locations in Alberta during the month of August. The show is a major attraction of Alberta's "Festival of the Arts" and was designed to celebrate Alberta's 75th. The performers in the travelling show are **John Allan Cameron, the Duck Donald Band, Stan Rogers, Sylvia Tyson, Connie Kaldor, Stringband, Paul Hann, Joan MacIsaac and Jim Post**; the form of presentation will be an outdoor event styled after the Winnipeg Folk Festival.

The event provides the unique opportunity for community involvement, since in every community a local group will act as the sponsor of the event with a provision for local input. Many communities will add dance groups, art and craft displays, local performers, etc. The event adds a learning element too, in that each community will have the opportunity to host a major event and be assisted through all phases by **Mitch Podolak** and his crew on stage and the representatives of Alberta Culture on the promotional side. There is no doubt that the growing profile of folk music in Alberta will be enhanced by this event.

The "Travelling Festival" will form a small part of Edmonton's three-day folk festival August 8-10 and in Calgary it will be part of a two-day festival August 28-9, with local performers and other performers from Canada and the U.S. All Calgary folk clubs are giving their full support to the event which will result in a heightened public profile at the start of the new club season in September.

Now, all Alberta needs is a dry August!  
*Anne Davies*

## FOLK CLASSES IN CALGARY

A decade ago, it was difficult to find more than a dozen folk musicians in Calgary, and almost impossible to find someone to teach folk music. Today, the city has many thriving folk clubs, several lounges that feature entertainment in the folk style, and a network of evening classes in folk music instruction. These classes are sponsored by the Continuing Education Departments of the Calgary School Board and the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology. Similar classes for youths are offered by the city's Parks and Recreation Department.

Four nights a week, in fall and winter, classrooms are filled with people who want to exchange the frustrations of daytime occupations for the frustrations of fingerpicking. The satisfaction they gain must be worth the effort because the classes are steadily growing in popularity. This popularity is reflected in statistics from the three institutions. Eight years ago, the School Board ran an ad for a beginner's folk guitar class and sixteen people registered. In 1979, the Board advertised classes in beginner, intermediate and advanced guitar, ragtime and flatpicking guitar, five-string banjo, mandolin, harmonica, autoharp, ukelele and recorder. A total of 813 people registered. Of this number, 466 enrolled in beginner's folk guitar—the class that started it all. That's quite a jump from 16.

Why have so many Calgarians forsaken the comforts of TV-watching for the challenge of learning to play instruments? There are three or four main reasons, according to Jim Thompson, program co-ordinator for the School Board's classes. "One reason is often overlooked because it's so basic," says Jim Thompson, program co-ordinator for the School Board's classes. "One reason is often overlooked because it's so basic," says Jim, "and that is that people need a night out, a social evening once a week to help them get through the long winter. They

associate folk music with a good time and want to learn how to strum a few tunes for parties or family get-togethers." His comments are echoed by Tom Barton, director of S.A.I.T.'s program. "We offer instruction in guitar only, and we find it popular with people who want to have a good time with other people while they learn. They don't necessarily want to become fantastic musicians, but they do want the company of other people."

S.A.I.T. began its program six years ago with one class. This has grown to enrolments of over 300 people per year in Calgary, and another 300 participants in classes held in neighbouring towns. S.A.I.T. guitar teachers travel as far away as Vulcan (90 miles from the city) to teach an evening class. "Our teachers find the country people never miss classes." Tom said. "They work hard at the music and some of our best players come from the small towns."

But not all the good players come from outside the city. Some of the performers in the city's folk clubs started out in the beginner's classes in Calgary. "Some of the performers teach for us in the evening classes," says Jim, "and that's a second reason for the success of the program. It's a big attraction to learn from someone who has 'made it'. If the students can go to a club and see their teacher singing and playing, it makes their classes more exciting."

For the kids in the Parks and Recreation classes, the media is a big motivating factor. One teacher says that the kids are there because they want to emulate someone they've heard on the radio: "I've never taught one yet who didn't come into class with a copy of a particular song under his arm and ask to learn to play like his favourite singer."

Some of the young people are interested in songs with social commentary, while adults prefer more light-hearted, contemporary songs. Tom Barton at S.A.I.T. says that their program sticks mainly to 'pop' folk songs, "the stuff that everybody likes to sing around a campfire."

You need portable instruments to sing around a campfire. That's why the classes are so popular. "You can't lug a piano into the woods," says Jim Thompson, "but banjos, guitars, mandolins and harmonicas can be packed into camping gear without any trouble. Calgarians are great campers, living so close to the mountains, and the portability of folk instruments is crucial."

Equally crucial is the simplicity of the music, which makes it possible for beginners to build up a repertoire of songs in a short time. According to Tom, the stuff is so simple that if you can count to eight and tap your foot, you can learn everything in the beginner's course.

The curious thing is that there are very few women in the advanced classes, even though more women than men start out at the beginner level. According to the School Board's records, out of 18 beginners, at least 12 will be women. In the intermediate classes, the ratio is usually half men, half women; and in advanced classes, out of 18 students, 15 will be men. Jim thinks this phenomenon may be related to the 'macho' image many people have of guitar players. "I think when men start the classes, they have a mental image of themselves as super players and performers, tied in somehow with a vision of the rock star and his guitar." Jim maintains that women start classes because they just want to strum and sing a few songs with their family and friends, a much more realistic goal.

The entire program, from beginner to advanced, has been criticized by lovers of traditional folk music in Calgary. They claim the music taught is not true folk music, but rather bland 'pop' stuff for bland minds. But both 'pop' and traditional songs have their place in the '80's. "People today want happy music," says Jim Thompson at the School Board, "and that's why these programs are successful. They know they can come and have a good time while they learn."

The '70's are over, but as Calgary heads into the '80's, the directors of these evening classes are gearing up for heavy enrolments and are always looking for more teachers as the number of classes grows. The instruction may not be aimed at producing Dylans or Guthries, but it does teach people how to make their own music and have fun doing it. As a result, Calgary now has its share of folk musicians, and that's a happier situation that existed ten years ago.

*Connie Allen*